

EPA Addresses Questions Raised at February Public Meeting

Himco Dump Site
Elkhart, Indiana

May 2008

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency met with Elkhart residents in February to discuss issues related to the Himco Dump Superfund site. Several questions and concerns emerged as dominant themes by residents. EPA promised to look into those concerns and get back to the community with answers.

Bottled water for residents

Many residents near the Himco site said they are worried about the quality of drinking water coming from private wells. They said they wanted those responsible for the pollution to provide bottled water immediately for drinking and cooking.

Bayer Healthcare LLC is now providing bottled water service under provisions of a consent decree with EPA. Eight East Side families are getting bottled water service. All of the South Side families are on the city water system and do not need bottled water.

Testing of private wells

A related issue was the safety of private wells. Residents want their wells tested to determine the quality of the water, which is used not only for drinking and cooking but also for washing and watering vegetable gardens. No date on testing of private wells has been set.

EPA is working with Bayer Healthcare to develop a plan for testing monitoring wells first. That plan is expected to take about a year. After the design for monitoring-well testing is approved, Bayer Healthcare and EPA will address the issue of testing private wells.

Language on access agreements

Many residents complained that the language of access agreements was too difficult to understand and felt they should have a lawyer interpret it for them. The cost of hiring a lawyer made that an unpleasant prospect.

Bayer Healthcare's legal staff significantly simplified the language. Revised agreements will be sent soon to affected residents. The agreements also contained a provision giving Bayer Healthcare access to the properties for 49 years, with an option for an additional 49 years. The new agreement limits the access period.

Cost of city water

Bayer Healthcare will be responsible for connecting 39 East Side residents adjacent to the site to the city water supply and permanently capping their private wells. The company estimated city water would cost an average of about \$20 a month for each household. When residents disputed that figure, EPA offered to consult with the city water company to determine an accurate estimated cost. While individual household usage is a major factor in actual costs, the Elkhart Office of Public Works told EPA that consumers could expect to pay about \$25 a month or less for normal usage.

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Bayer Healthcare says the water bill will be partly offset by savings in electricity needed to operate pumps on the private wells.

Permanent payment of water bills

Many residents said Bayer Healthcare should pay their water bills as long as they own and live in the houses. The company offered to pay for connection to the city water system and give each of the nearby households \$1,000 to ease the expense of city water.

Based on city estimates of cost, that amount will cover average household water usage for about three years. Bayer Healthcare has not agreed to the request for permanent payment of water bills

